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INTRODUCING THE DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH

by Hillary Webb
Director of Research

Hello everyone,

It's great to be here and officially part of The Monroe Institute family! This is a remarkable place, full of remarkable people, and I'm really thrilled to be here. Thanks to everyone for making me feel instantly at home.

Since coming on board as Research Director this month, a number of people have asked me what my "plans" are. I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce myself, talk a little about the research vision that is unfolding here at TMI, and how my position factors into that.

First, a little about me and how I came to be here. My interest in all things pertaining to consciousness began when I was very young and has been with me for most of my life. What started as a personal passion eventually became an academic and professional one as well, beginning with the publication of two books on shamanism, then completing my master's degree in consciousness studies at Goddard College, then going on to receive my PhD in psychology (with a focus in psychological anthropology and the anthropology of consciousness) from Saybrook University. In addition to my duties here at TMI, I am managing editor of Anthropology of Consciousness journal, the peer-reviewed publication of the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness, a division of the American Anthropological Association.

I first became involved with TMI back in 2002 when I took Gateway Voyage and Remote Viewing back to back. A year later I attended Guidelines. A year or two after that, I found myself invited to a (non-TMI-related) meeting in the area, where I re-met Paul Rademacher. Over the next few years, Paul and I kept in contact off and on, occasionally exchanging ideas about the consciousness studies field and TMI's role within it. Around the time I was finishing up my doctoral work, Paul, Skip, and I began discussing the possibility that my background and experience might fit into the new research zeitgeist that was emerging at TMI.

For a really good overview of this vision, I recommend taking a look at the article entitled, "The Monroe Institute Research Methodology" located in the "Research" section on the TMI website. However, to sum up, TMI is currently at the beginning of a new phase of its evolution in regards to its research focus. Over the last several decades, much of TMI's and others' research has used quantitative methodologies in the investigation of binaural beats and human consciousness (for example, laboratory experiments and numerical methods such as statistical

modeling), many of which were done with the intent of uncovering the physiological correlates of these altered states and/or getting an overview of how binaural beat technologies influence the behavior and psychology of specific populations. Thanks to these important studies, we now have much more insight into and understanding of the physiological and behavioral implications of binaural beats on consciousness.

While TMI will most certainly continue to encourage and support further quantitative investigations such as these, Skip and Paul's intuition was that TMI should shift the research focus to include more qualitative approaches. Qualitative inquiry, which places primary importance on the first-person subjective experience of an individual or individuals, has proved itself to be of great value in coming to understand and create hypotheses about the nature of human existence and its resulting phenomena. Rather than trying to physiologically and/or psychologically verify or explain (or, in some cases, "explain away") the inner experience that an individual has in an altered state of consciousness, qualitative researchers record the experience exactly as it is expressed by the individual, then analyze the words, symbols, and metaphors used within these narratives in order to uncover patterns, themes, and holistic features. As a social science researcher, I find this form of inquiry highly enlightening, and see great potential as to what it might teach us about human consciousness. Again, this is not to say that quantitative studies will no longer play a role in our research initiatives. On the contrary, I feel very strongly that both methods of inquiry are equally valid and essential to moving this exploration forward.

In addition to this shift in focus to qualitative methodologies, this new research vision includes an emphasis on a professional model that we believe will be a fruitful alternative to the traditional research mindset. If the "old" research model is the "copyright approach"-which typically involves an attitude of secrecy and control of information in order for professional and financial gain-then what we are aiming for is a "copyleft approach," in which information and intellectual discovery is shared freely and openly with our peers in the field. Our belief is that through open dialogue, collaboration, and a sharing of knowledge amongst colleagues (both professional and nonprofessional and from the many diverse areas of consciousness research) all of us will be able to make greater strides and discoveries than ever before. To quote Paul: "Our current research vision is as much about creating a new community as it is about research itself." Part of my job as research director is to help facilitate a kind of "intellectual barter system," in which individuals from diverse backgrounds and fields bring their unique insights and knowledge together.

Many more ideas have been percolating, but in an effort to keep this introductory letter short(ish) and digestible, I'll leave it there for now. Time will tell the exact shape and directions that all this takes. I'll again quote Paul who says, "The study of human consciousness is in the process of designing itself as we speak" and we here at TMI are in a position to be both a participant and a facilitator in that new design. My role at TMI is to initiate opportunities for the

institute to be part of this wider conversation through education, investigation, and the facilitation of research partnerships. Here's a sampling of just a few projects already underway:

1) One of my primary tasks is acting as a liaison between TMI and other research institutions. For example, TMI has developed a partnership with the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia and are assisting them in their studies on near death experiences, out of body experiences, and other "extraordinary" states of consciousness. Part of the overall plan is to make further connections that can likewise grow into mutually beneficial relationships.

2) Along these lines, I will be available to assist TMI's professional members and other independent researchers in designing and/or implementing their research projects (both qualitative and quantitative) involving TMI technologies. I am currently creating a database of research articles pertaining to binaural beats and other audio-guidance technologies. This information will eventually become part of the research library on the TMI website and will allow individuals interested in binaural beats, audio-guidance technologies, and other topics pertaining to consciousness to locate relevant literature to aid in their research.

3) As always, one of the primary goals of research at TMI is the development of tools and techniques for the exploration of consciousness. Part of my job will be the investigation and development of complementary technologies that can aid our program participants in their own explorations.

These initiatives are the "jumping off place" that will set the stage for TMI's research future. The scope of these initiatives will no doubt continue to grow. My hope is in the next few months to start a blog on the TMI website that will keep everyone updated on the latest projects and ideas. This blog will give folks the opportunity to add comments, thoughts, suggestions, dreams, and desires in regards to the direction that TMI research is going.

I am thrilled to be part of this process and have no doubt that it will take us in some exciting directions. I look forward to the conversations and explorations yet to come!